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Dublin's Forgotten: The transition from 'separated children' to 'aged-out minors' through policy, media, and organizational support.

By Meghan Jairo

INTRODUCTION

"The key challenge facing both Government and Irish society is the imperative to integrate people of many different cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions so they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century."

Conor Lenihan, Minister for Integration

Over the last fifteen years, Ireland has undergone massive change: political, economic, social, and technological. During the Celtic Tiger that began in the mid 1990s, Ireland has been transformed from one of the poorest countries in Western Europe to one of the wealthiest. Resulting from this economic success and, concurrently with the expansion of the European Union, there has been a significant increase in Ireland's migrant population. Due to the recent attraction of Ireland's prosperity and progression, many from outside of Ireland have immigrated with hopes to reap economic and social benefits.

Others are forced to migrate due to danger, perils, and political unrest in their home country. Ireland's membership within the European Union creates the opportunity for refugees and asylum seekers to arrive on the island, which has raised many issues that the Irish must address. Asylum-seekers and refugees come to Ireland on the basis of varying circumstances as opposed to economic migrants who hope for better and bountiful employment. These refugees and asylum seekers have been forced out of their

homelands due to danger of persecution, torture, sexual exploitation, or subjection to other human rights violations (Moolen 2006:8).

Initially, I tailored this study to focus on the experience of “separated children” in the North Dublin area and how they are integrated into Irish society. “Separated children” are part of a specific category of asylum seekers who are unaccompanied children (without parental or guardian supervision) and who are seeking refuge from their country of origin which poses imminent danger. Prior to obtaining research, I developed an investigation on how separated children are integrated into Irish society and what aspects of Irish identity are conveyed to them. Quickly I found that this premise, though intriguing, would not be a practical endeavor to pursue. Many difficulties discussed in the Methodology section highlight some of the issues that essentially redirected the research.

“Aged-out minors” are asylum seekers who have arrived in Ireland under the status of “separated children” and yet have not received notification of status throughout the asylum process before they turn 18 years of age (Moreno). After researching and speaking with a few aged-out minors, I have realized that this issue is largely ignored by Irish society and that there are many difficulties and obstacles that arise for those who find themselves in this “liminal stage”. Therefore, I decided to focus on the difficulties aged-out minors face once they turn the legal age of 18 years old and how this affects their experience of reception among the Irish. Many themes and questions have surfaced that encompassed many elements, such as the policy formulated and determined by the Irish Government; the media portrayal of asylum seekers and the influence of media on

Irish society as a whole; and the supportive institutions that assist aged-out minors by filling in the voids that the government has left.

Working with refugee children ranging in ages 6-18 in Vermont for the past three years have been a very influential and rewarding experience for me. By mentoring and tutoring these children, I have recognized the difficulties and struggles faced by refugee and asylum-seeking communities. Therefore, upon arriving in Dublin, I was surprised to see so much diversity and multicultural activity. With interests in human rights and the effects of globalization, I determined that I wanted to investigate a focused issue that affects asylum-seekers.

I met Manuela Moreno, a coordinator of the Separated Children's Education Service located on Parnell Square in February 2009 and was quickly entranced by the stories she shared concerning separated children and aged-out minors who currently live in Dublin while waiting for family reunification or for a refugee application decision. Immediately, I recognized parallels with the stories of those she works with and the children I mentor at home. I knew that my study would develop around asylum-seeking children and young adults and what sort of difficulties they face in Dublin. Manuela would become a key informant and informative gatekeeper for my study's development and because we both have similar stories and experiences to share, a friendship quickly formed.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed in this study consisted of qualitative procedure rather than quantitative, in effort to focus directly on a narrow issue and illuminate personal stories, reflections, and opinions in order to gain core insight. Bryman (2001) notes that

“the unstructured data collection style of qualitative research can be used to suggest alternative avenues of enquiry or ways of thinking about the phenomenon being investigated”. (Bryman 2001:287)

Qualitative methods of obtaining data are most appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research question and the fact that Irish policy and attitudes concerning separated children and asylum-seekers is a relatively new concept for Ireland. The flexibility within this approach enabled those whom I contacted to raise additional or unanticipated issues that inevitably contribute to research findings. (McCrea 2006:10).

Some methods utilized in gathering this study’s research included the snowball sampling technique. Bryman (2001) describes this as one where

“the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others.”

Therefore, this approach allowed me to access people whom I may never had the opportunity to meet and it helped me to establish legitimacy. Manuela Moreno was my initial contact and resource think tank that provided me with information and access to other organizations that work with separated children and aged-out minors. Her guidance led me to meet with members of Integrating Ireland, The Irish Refugee Council, the Vincentian Refugee Centre, and a handful of aged-out minors who reside in Viking Lodge Hostel in Dublin 8. My connection with Manuela particularly came in handy when I met the aged-out minors for three hours. I believe they were much more open to me because I was introduced by Manuela, therefore clearing any anticipations or anxieties they may have had about me. The information I received proved to be the most fruitful and revealing in terms of my focus, and therefore provided the crux of my findings.

Also, this technique was necessary given the absence of published knowledge on this study's focus. Each interview I participated in brought forth new information, ideas, and many other references to similar organizations and projects. After meeting with Monica from Integrating Ireland and Jyothi at Irish Refugee Council, I was directed to even more organizations and groups that would offer pertinent information for my focus. Unfortunately the short time allotment restricted me from exploring more avenues of this subject, but I referred to these organizations' websites for statistics, mission statements, and other helpful information. Following this section is a compilation of consulted organizations and some information about the people whom I met.

This qualitative method also shaped the information and opinions that I was exposed. Those whom I interviewed would give me information very similar to others

because of the nature of their work. Most of my meetings included those working with refugee and immigrant policy as well as those committed to community outreach and youth work services for separated children. Had a meeting with a politician been arranged, the study might have taken a diverse detour. Overall, many of those I came into contact with had negative perspectives on Irish governmental action and legislation concerning asylum-seekers. Perhaps an appointment with a politician would have created a more rounded image of this study, but there were slim chances of a realistic expectation for such an interview. In an effort to balance the information I received, I did find the Minister of State for Integration Conor Lenihan's webpage to be informative. Therefore, an effort was made to reveal the many arguments and opinions about aged-out minors in Dublin.

Another element of gathering data was volunteering. Two Tuesday afternoons were devoted to volunteering at the Foundations Project, a small but efficient program designed to give homeless children between the ages of 10 and 15 space to call their own. Also, on one Monday evening, I participated in a "book drive" which is an effort to distribute books to those living in state funded accommodations to promote reading and the Foundations program. Though many experiences and information derived from this opportunity did not bring forth primary research material for the study's specific concentration, many elements and themes were present and helped illuminate the experience. It was intriguing to see another vulnerable group in Irish society, how it is perceived and what programs are developed for its support and benefit.

There were many impediments and limitations in the process of this study. The most obvious was the restriction of time. Due to the short time allotment for gathering,

synthesizing, analyzing, and writing this study, the focus needed to be narrowed. More time would equate with more information that could obtain more depth. Also ethic issues related to separated children and aged-out minors were raised.

Ethical Issues relating to the participation of separated children/aged-out minors:

When conducting a study on aged-out minors, there were many ethical considerations to take into account. Observing separated children in youth work organizations was also an impossible task that was not anticipated. Many youth organizations have ethics codes in order to protect the anonymity of the children that they provide services. Therefore, access to children was nearly impossible. With this said, I was given the opportunity to meet aged-out minors who were between the ages of 18-22 in order to gather their personal stories about their process of integration into Ireland (Moreno). Participants in the study were completely voluntary and were assured that the research findings would be completely confidential and anonymous. Information derived from this opportunity provided great insight into the difficulties faced for aged-out minors who are currently under Direct Provision. Secondly, because asylum-seekers and refugees are an especially vulnerable group that may be suffering from physical, psychological, or emotional damage, there is a strong initiative to protect them from predators and others who may seek harm (Brennan).

Establishing Rapport:

Young asylum-seekers who have been separated from family members may not want to talk about their family or about the present circumstances in their home countries. It was difficult to craft the discussion towards important information while remaining conscious of sensitive issues.

The most valuable information contributed to this study derived from one afternoon spent at a HSE sponsored hostel called Vikings Lodge Hostel and is located in Dublin 8 near Christ Cathedral, which houses roughly 50 aged-out minors. Five participants whom I met voluntarily agreed to help and were told that they did not have to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. Therefore, I sought common interests that we share, such as sports, foods, or anything else that would “break the ice”. By doing this, I gathered information about them personally and often would lead to tangents that could open the door to answer some questions. Overall, most of the participants, after establishing some rapport with me, were very open and responsive, thus making the afternoon very informative and enlightening.

Interestingly enough, many of those who consented to speak with me did so on certain stipulations. Prior to asking them questions, they wished to know what was the intent of my research and how much depth I was aiming for. After answering a few of their questions, I was given the non-verbal cue of a smile that I was accepted in their environment and that research could then be conducted. I was very impressed by the turning of the tables, and I realized just how responsive and aware these individuals were. Overall, the case studies illuminated many themes and issues that aged-out minors are presented with, and the experience provided fruitful information.

Despite the many dilemmas I encountered, I did enjoy a few strengths that allowed me to achieve further depth and insight. Being a female, I was seen as less threatening and more empathetic, therefore those whom I met were more responsive. It was also interesting that many people had connections with the United States. In fact, the first two individuals I met were from Montreal, Canada and New Hampshire, United

States. Therefore, it appeared that national commonalities were aligned and allowed me to attain additional information and establish rapport. Thirdly, with previous experience with refugee children in America, I was able to sensitize some of my questions in effort to minimize harm to the participants. I was also able to share my own stories with those who work with young asylum seekers in Ireland thus establishing a connection.

Research was also obtained through a more academic framework, in that it was essential to create parallels of qualitative research with theory and other published documentation. Prior to meetings at the several organizations, I planned to have already “done my homework” by browsing their websites and online publications and therefore enabled me to ask fruitful questions. Most individuals whom I met were extremely busy and therefore did not have a lot of time to speak with me. This method allowed me to utilize the precious time intelligently and so I could attain information, stories, and opinions not otherwise found in publications.

Research on asylum-seeking and refugee policy also seemed imperative especially after the first few meetings mentioned that only through legislation and governmental action that Irish people are introduced to asylum-seekers and refugees. Such academic research helped me to gain background information that could possibly colour my direct experience with the aged-out minors. Books and anthologies about immigration and cultural change in Ireland, racism and policies concerning immigrants and asylum seekers found at the Ilac Centre on Parnell Street helped to distinguish some of the elements facing asylum seekers and their reception by the Irish. Theories on social capital by Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu also contributed.

Targeted Geographical Spread:

Given that most separated children and aged-out minors are accommodated within the Dublin area (including Dun Laoghaire), respondents from Dublin based organizations were targeted in the research. I was careful on reading the statistics and facts that I was given because some consulted organizations work on a national level. Sometimes facts and figures would represent Ireland as a whole, rather than just the Dublin area. Being the particular focus on Dublin, it was very important to use Dublin statistics as a framework. With this said, other information regarding to programs, groups, and organizations outside of Dublin provided auxiliary material that benefited the objectives of this study. The location of the groups and organizations are listed at the end of this section.

In order to demonstrate my own growth and the impact of my experience throughout this study, I utilized the case studies, displayed in a Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project publication as well as the case studies that I pursued at Vikings Lodge Hostel. They allowed me to apply the recurring elements and themes that exemplify some of the difficulties and struggles aged-out minors face throughout the transition of asylum policy.

The final step in producing the final composition of this study included combing through the field notes I had gathered from the two and a half week research period and underlining common threads that would inevitably create the patchwork of this study's findings. Throughout the entire research period, these field notes were continually consulted in order to develop some structure of making sense of the gathered data. I believe that this step was very necessary in illuminating the difficulties and practicalities among aged-out minors during their experience. Therefore, these themes presented in the field notes makes up the body of this study's findings.

Lastly, to demonstrate the practicability of themes and struggles, I applied the field notes to the case studies that I conducted. I believe that this step was essential in measuring my own growth and understanding of the issues concerning aged-out minors in an ever-increasing multicultural Dublin.

Consulted Organizations/Participants*

Irish Refugee Council: The IRC is an independent non-governmental organization that was set up in 1992 in response to the influx of refugees in Ireland. The IRC's head office is located in Dublin. The IRC works on several levels ranging from local to national. The local level deals with the broad range of issues affecting the local refugee community whereas on the national level, includes policy, research, legal, networking and information components.

Vision Statement: The Irish Refugee Council's vision is of "a just, fair and inclusive Irish society where people seeking refuge are welcome and valued."

Mission Statement: "To pursue fair, consistent and transparent policies and to promote informed public attitudes in relation to people seeking refuge."

www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/aboutus

Participant: Jyothi Kanics is originally from New Hampshire in America. Growing up in an integrated neighborhood with a refugee father, Jyothi became an advocate and enthusiast for human rights which would spark her interest to work for the Irish Refugee Council. Living in Ireland for the past three years has been an important personal journey, as she has witnessed Ireland's political response of refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers.

Immigrant Council of Ireland: The ICI is a national, independent non-governmental organization that promotes the rights of migrants through information, legal advice, advocacy, lobbying, research and training work. Established in 2001 by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy, the center strives to provide a response for the visual changing social needs in Ireland.

Mission Statement: The ICI believes immigration is a permanent and positive reality in Ireland and continues to lobby for integrated, transparent, rights-based immigration and integration legislation and policies that reflect this reality.

www.immigrantcouncil.ie/

Integrating Ireland: Integrating Ireland is an independent network of community and voluntary groups working in mutual solidarity to promote and to realize the human rights, equality and full integration of migrants, immigrants, refugees and people seeking asylum.

Vision: A just diverse and inclusive Irish society that ensures the full participation and rights of migrants, immigrants, refugees and people seeking asylum.

*Information was found on the organizations' websites.

Participant: Monica Anne Brennan is a networkng coordinator at Integrating Ireland. She is a Canadian national who is interested in multiculturalism and immigrants and had lived in a community with a large immigrant population in Quebec. She has worked for Integrating Ireland for nine years, therefore she is well versed and experienced with Ireland's response and reception of asylum seekers during the height of the Celtic Tiger.

www.integratingireland.ie

Vincentian Refugee Centre: The VRC is a welcoming and hospitable place that seeks a decent quality of life and living circumstances for asylum-seekers and acts to lessen the difficulties toward integration. The Aims of the VRC is to work for social justice, to contribute to policy and legislation, to work with non-governmental and statutory agencies to support minority ethnic groups to integrate into Irish society. The Centre offers a plethora of services that range from social, cultural, and religious integration to advocacy, settlement, mediation, to providing information on social welfare, education, health, employment, and asylum and Immigration law.

Vision: Our vision is of a society that promotes the dignity and well being of all.

Participant: Sr. Ursula Mullen works for the Vincentian Refugee Centre and believes that faith and religion are practical and important components of creating a support system for refugees and asylum seekers, especially for women. Through the aims of the VRC, she believes that information can be transferred via word of mouth through these support groups that direct the individuals to other services they may otherwise not become aware of. Sr. Ursula is from Northern Ireland and mentioned that though she loves the necessary work of VRC, sometimes it is important to get back to her own roots and reconnect with Irish customs.

www.vincentians.ie/VRC.htm

Separated Children's Education Service: The Separated Children Education Program offers a variety of services to young asylum seekers and refugees. The students that generally participate in this HSE-funded program are between 15-21 years of age and

are all separated children and young people in the care of the Health Service Executive (HSE). This means they are seeking asylum in Ireland and are here without any family or adults. Most of the children are awaiting an imperative decision on their cases and are living in hostel accommodations. Meals are provided for them, in addition to some school expenses assistance and 19 euro a week for spending money.

This program offers many different programs, such as the Homework Club as well as a Big Brother, Big Sister mentoring program. During the summer, there are summer camps where the focus is to continue working on English skills but to also have fun! Students, along with volunteers and volunteer-supervisors go fishing and participate on day trips around the Dublin area.

Participant: Manuela Moreno is from Spain and has previously worked with Irish inner-city youth in Dublin before becoming a coordinator of the Separated Children's Education Service. She was a key component to this study as she directed me to other people who work with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

www.cdvec.ie/en/index.cfm/do/UnaccompaniedMinors

UNHCR: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State. The office in Dublin focuses its efforts on Ireland's asylum seekers and programme refugees. Valuable information was found in UNHCR's publications, which contributed to this study.

www.unhcr.org

Vikings Lodge Hostel: The location where the case studies were conducted. It is a hostel that houses roughly 50 aged-out minors in the Dublin 8 area. More information about the hostel is included in the case study section.

Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project: A group of concerned people (all volunteers), living mainly in the greater Dun-Laoghaire area, who try to help refugees and asylum seekers, especially the young. It began in June 2001, when the founder members met in Dun Laoghaire and decided to form an Association and Trust. There were then two hostels (Old School House and Sandycove House) for asylum seekers in Dun Laoghaire. Later on, hostels were opened at Killiney and at Newtown, Dun Laoghaire. Information found on www.drp.ie contributed to this study by providing a few case studies.

www.drp.ie

Advisor: Eamon Rafter was my project advisor who currently works with the Glencree Peace and Reconciliation Centre in County Wicklow. Eamon gave support, direction, and "food for thought" throughout this process and was able to offer some information about aged-out minors and about the asylum-seeking population in Ireland in general.

The Findings

Policy and Media:

This portion discusses the findings of this study's research. Common themes that were produced include: the policy that affects aged-out minors; the difficulties faced by this certain population and the misconceptions of them portrayed by the Irish media; and social capital and integrative measures.

This first section examines the historical responses and intent of asylum policy that has shaped the current system. The arrival of increasing numbers of asylum seekers in recent years has been confronted by racism and intolerance within Irish political and public discourse. During the Celtic Tiger, Ireland quickly became one of the wealthiest and most progressive countries in the European Union therefore recreating its role on the international front.

Most aged-out minors have arrived to Ireland as “separated children” during the height of asylum-seeking applications in Ireland (2000-2003). Children are vulnerable in society and are expected to learn “normal” cultural and social indicators through the adults that nurture them. Refugees and asylum-seekers are extremely marginalized, are

usually bracketed in the lowest socio-economic strata of society, and face many psychological, emotional, social, and cultural difficulties and hardships. Separated children are perhaps the most susceptible group within a society because they do not have the support from nurturers or adult figures, of whom would usually teach and exhibit acceptable social and cultural cues and behaviours, nor do they have any resources to battle the hardships that refugees tend to face.

There are approximately 200 aged out minors in Dublin (Moreno) but the actual statistics of this group varies and can be misleading for a few reasons. First of all, there are few publications concerning aged-out minors. Aged-out minors, sometimes go missing and therefore become invisible to Dublin's public eye. Also, upon reaching the age of 18, asylum-seekers are given the opportunity for voluntary assisted return and re-integration, meaning that they are given the choice to return to their country of origin. Many take this opportunity due to their increasing hopelessness. These variables create a problematic situation of providing accurate aged-out minors' statistics in Dublin.

Difficulties and hardships do not desist once the child becomes eighteen, and yet current policy suggests that as an adult, these individuals are seen through a different lens. More than ever, this group of asylum seekers finds that it must become more independent without making decision with their own free will. Also, as asylum-seekers who have just become adults, there are no longer benefits for them to enjoy, such as enrolling in full-time education or attending a variety of organizations that are designed to provide support and friendship, such as youth work organizations under direct provision guidelines (Barrington 2009:4).

Though there are still a few programs that include aged-out minors, the Irish attitude towards them have changed and therefore create more psychological and emotional burdens for the aged-out minors. They become an “economic threat, petty criminals, or social welfare mongers” who are using up previous government funding while refusing to give back to society. Therefore, an investigation into policy and legislation proved to be important in order to better understand the cultural and social features of this issue. Much gathered information suggested that most of Irish society does not receive information on the issues surrounding separated children or aged-out minors other than through policy and the reporting of media. Therefore, legislation concerning asylum-seekers will have a positive or negative effect on the native Irish population and will essentially shape their own attitudes and beliefs.

Transition Through History:

Historically, the country was perceived as a poor, rural, homogenous society that suffered from high emigration levels, and this rapid turn around to a productive, prosperous nation was so swift that it made the country dizzy. Much of Ireland’s success during the Celtic Tiger was due to its decision to open its borders to allow international corporations, businesses, and workers in response to the booming economic forecast. By holding membership in the socially progressive and changing European Union, Ireland entered the era of globalization, and effectively agreed to provide a safe haven for asylum seekers and refugees (Moteen 2006:8).

This quick transition from a homogenous society to a multicultural and progressive one is clearly reflective in Ireland’s policy and process for accepting or denying those who arrive at Irish ports of entry and who claim that they seek refuge from

their country of origin. Due to the historical tensions and fear created by a portrait painted by the media of a refugee crisis that threatens Irish society, it can be argued that there are institutional strategies in discouraging asylum seekers from applying through the Irish asylum policy and system (Fanning 2007:3). The use of media helped to cast terror among the Irish public, thus allowing restrictive legislation that leads to social exclusion for the asylum seekers.

Transition from Child to Adult: The Structure of Policy

According to Monica and Jyothi, the application process for seeking asylum in Ireland is confusing and discouraging. This section defines the process and poses a few questions and observations that suggest that the structure of such a procedure systematically inhibits individuals from outlets that build or link social capital.

Under the current Irish Asylum Process procedure, applications for refugee status are processed by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) which is independent of the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. For separated children arriving at a port of entry or at the ORAC office must be referred to the Health Board which oversees the child's well being (Kanics). The Health Board may decide that an application for asylum should be made on behalf of the minor and the Health Board. The Health Board can request specific arrangements that are made with ORAC in order to support the minor throughout the process, including attending the interview.

Throughout this process, the child does not have the ability to speak on his or her own behalf, and therefore becomes a subject of the process that cannot be controlled (McCrea 2006:22). The lack of control or self-determination was a recurring theme throughout the data gathering process.

According to the HSE, its responsibilities when assisting separated children through the asylum process is:

1. Making the decision as to whether it is in the best interest of the child to make an application for asylum
2. Offer support for the child through the application process
3. Provide for the immediate and ongoing needs and welfare of the child through appropriate placement and links with health, psychological, social and education services. (HSE website)

These responsibilities are indicated in the Refugee Act of 1996 and the Child Care Act in 1991. However, when the child turns 18, the HSE is no longer responsible for them, and allows them to go through the asylum process as an adult. Along with the problems and challenges separated children face upon arrival to Ireland such as bereavement from family and friends, social isolation, language barriers, emotion and mental health problems, discrimination and racism, those who find themselves in this liminal state forced to continue through the asylum process alone.

Turning 18 years old without receiving a decision, aged-out minors are no longer under the HSE and are:

“transferred to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), and moved into adult accommodation centers. Once they have completed secondary education, they cannot access work, third level education, or vocational training, and hence they are forced into being dependent on the State”. (Mooten 2006:61)

Many aged-out minors at this time are under direct provision, which is a program that assigns asylum seekers for state-funded accommodations (generally set in hostels) with meals included and 19.10 euro a week to serve as spending money. The aged-out minors at Vikings Lodge Hostel mentioned the inefficiency of this program and how it restricts rather than accommodates their actual needs. One young man from Afghanistan,

who has been awaiting his application decision for three years, firmly stated that the accommodations and food were minimal and insufficient. Other testimonies confirmed that the food provided is often inadequate and the modest weekly stipend does not satisfactorily supplement the meals with snacks or other food.

Interestingly enough, most of these hostels are privately run and maintained, and therefore is a good economic opportunity for a person who owns a hostel-appropriate location. According to the Irish Refugee Council study *Making Separated Children Visible*, private not-for-profit bodies frequently manage the hostels or private agencies incorporated as private limited companies. Also private hostels are inspected by the HSE only, which demonstrates a lack of external scrutiny. On several occasions, it was alluded that the owners of these places have a great motivation to skim on the maintenance of the building, keep heating levels low, and serve inexpensive dishes in order to pocket most of the money allotted from the State. Oftentimes, those who run the accommodations for aged-out minors are friends, relatives, or acquaintances of ministers and other officials in government. Running a hostel for aged-out minors could be a very good business move.

The Vikings Lodge

The Vikings Lodge Hostel is a small, unattractive building that was previously used as a hotel. Upon entry, there is a circular lobby desk where two employees monitor television circuits and other security features, thus creating a prison like atmosphere. Two shabby chairs are awkwardly positioned in the lobby. A small dim and musty corridor opens up to the visiting room, again furnished with mix-match wooden chairs, wobbly and uneven tables and an old television hanging in the upper left hand corner. An old-fashioned bar is dusty, therefore not usually in use.

The atmosphere is not very welcoming at all, and there are three rubbish bags lying in the center of the room. This social space is usually crowded with residents and serves as an escape from the crowded bedrooms upstairs. Two to three individuals are bunked in one bedroom, therefore alone or quiet time is a rarity. Usually there is loud music that thumps and booms, which can be heard on the ground floor in the visiting area. The entire building casts a dismal and damp environment, without much light. With imposed restrictions on aged-out minors in terms of finding employment or attending school, they spend a lot of their time in this type of atmosphere, usually waiting for either a positive decision from the application process or a deportation notice.

The present conditions under the direct provision act are believed to restrict the ability for the aged-out minors to live independently. Without a say in the food they eat and the location where they sleep (and who shares a room with them), there is a greater chance of developed depression and hopelessness as anxiety of deportation and not knowing the “unknown” is a very real factor in every day life (Moreno). There is often a want to speak up, but “complaining” could potentially create a negative response throughout their application process, and therefore many aged out minors do not feel safe enough to confront the system. According to the aged-out minors, the lack of free will and choice often leads to feelings of hopelessness and despair (McCrea 2006:14)

Policies of Exclusion:

According to Fanning (2002), the inflexibility and unwelcoming policies towards asylum-seekers reflect historical responses that have stunted the possibility for efficient refugee policy. When the UN Convention on Human Rights was ratified by Ireland in 1956, the country admitted the first of a number of groups of programme refugees¹ from Hungary. Some may suggest that contemporary responses to asylum seekers in Ireland have been shaped by a legacy of exclusionary state practices and racism (Fanning 2002:87). With the circumstance of the Hungarian refugees, they were perceived as grateful and deserving, as evidence shows that they were welcomed by Irish society.

However, Irish hospitality was soon unraveled at an institutional level. The political response that emerged was shaped by the expectations that refugees and asylum seekers should not be burdensome to the state, and therefore much of the responsibility for care was delegated to the voluntary sector (Regan 2000:177). It was also expected

¹ Groups granted refugee status on arrival in host country.

that those who did not fit into the mold of the perceived monocultural Irish identity would be seen as an inexplicable problem. This response reflected an institutional monoculturalism that identified difference as a threat.

Fanning (2007), however, is wary of the idea that Ireland could be historically classified as a monocultural society. Societies in general possess fluidity and complexities that are not often reflected in policy. Essentially, it appears that the expectation to create policy and legislation based on a singular concept of “Irishness” cannot realistically reflect a fluid, changing, transforming society and culture.

Debates on new immigration societies naturally focus on who is allowed access and on which conditions for entry is necessary. With a greater motivation for integration, many questions are raised such as whether or not immigrants and asylum seekers will have to become more Irish than the Irish themselves? Will Ireland as a more diverse society shift towards a more multicultural model? If they do, what are the core values that all members of society might be expected to accept? The challenges posed by these issues are “compounded by the fact that Ireland shares the traditions of the European nation-state, often defining itself in exclusionary ways and grounded in cultural, linguistic, and historical experiences reflecting what has been called WHISC discourse” (Fanning 2007:215). The WHISC is a social construct that stands for white, heterosexual, Irish, settled, Catholic, which means that it is not a fact and does not adequately represent the realities of the country.

In the case of Ireland, the concept of Irish identity has become blurry and muffled by the bustling of the growing and adaptable city, but one must be forewarned to conclude that Ireland was always a monoculture. A study focusing specifically on Irish

identity itself would require much more time and energy than allotted for this research, thereby demonstrating the new conversations and discussions of traditional Ireland's response to the country's immersion in the global era. In terms of this study, however, it is necessary to note that while there is much cultural change and variety now visible in Dublin there was always diversity present, making Ireland a much more complicated and fluid society than usually perceived.

Containment in Irish Policy:

The policy of containment became an inevitable reaction to the increasing arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers. Exclusionary practices were then built into the legislative system in order to make it difficult to receive and approve refugees in Ireland. From 1994 the numbers of asylum seekers arriving independently began to rise rapidly from what had been a very small number each year. Politicians and officials within the media soon described this growing population of asylum seekers as a crisis, using descriptive words such as “swamped, influx, or waves” to cast a misleading portrait of the number of asylum seekers arriving in Ireland (Brennan). This representation invoked fear among the Irish people, and therefore reaffirmed the importance to restrict and exclude the individuals from Irish society. The decision to delay implementation of the Refugee Act (1996), which provided statutory protections for asylum seekers, confirms the belief that the responsibilities of the state unravel when legislative reforms are thought to be unworkable due to the inadequate infrastructure and system (Fanning 2002: 105).

Media:

Considering that the aged-out minor population in Dublin is small (about 200 aged-out minors), even by Irish standards, most Irish citizens learn or are exposed to the group only through policy and media. According to Philip Watt, co-ordinator of European Year Against Racism in Ireland, there are three popular misrepresentations of aged-out minors and asylum-seekers in Ireland that are contributed by the media which assists the formulation of public opinion. First, as asylum-seekers first began to enter Ireland, the media regularly suggested that Ireland was experiencing a flood of refugees, which created a false illusion that the country was undergoing massive cultural change and that the “Irish way of life” was under attack. Monica, a representative at Integrating Ireland, also confirmed this statement by recognizing that the suggestion of a tidal wave, or influx of immigrants, largely shaped a misconstrued public opinion on the immigrant and asylum-seeking population.

The media also regularly associates refugees with begging, petty theft, and crime, therefore creating a division among the Irish natives and refugees (Watt). These stories tend to develop and reinforce negative attitudes towards immigrants and asylum-seekers, often precipitating misconstrued or misinformed perceptions of the community. They are now viewed as detrimental and digressive for the host country’s social health and safety.

The media frequently repeats the claim that many asylum-seekers are bogus, with the only real reason of coming to Ireland in order to exploit the social welfare system (Watt). The imagery of the crisis depicted asylum-seekers as welfare scroungers, in competition with indigenous groups for welfare resources. One Irish woman believed that a refugee was given a state-funded car, therefore grossly miscalculating the services the State provides for refugees and asylum seekers.

To serve as another example, in 1999 a Department of Education official was advised “unofficially” by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform that asylum seekers should be charged to access adult education. Reported in the Irish Times:

Asylum seekers ‘are not supposed to work, and I have been told in writing that they should have no access to education.’ The letter accompanied an ‘information note’ sent to school and college principals in the Dublin area, instructing them that asylum seekers must pay more than 2000 euro a year to take Post Leaving Certificate courses. (Fanning 2002:106)

Therefore, there are many arguments that the current political infrastructure is not addressing the social issues that plague the aged-out minor community simply because it is designed to exclude such a population from Irish society and restrict it from adult education or employment. Ultimately, the impetus for exclusion has been driven by the state (Fanning 2002:109). The more recent media accounts depict the portrait that Ireland is threatened by the heavy influx of asylum seekers. This panic was “fuelled by representations of the asylum issue by ministers, politicians, and public officials, as insoluble, therefore creating series of fortified measures in order to repel asylum seekers from infiltrating Irish society” (Keogh 2000:124).

Age Determination;

Oftentimes, unaccompanied minors do not have appropriate official documentation stating who they are, where they have come from, or how old they are. In fact, in most instances a child may not even have a birth certificate. The Health Board, when recognizing asylum-seeking minors at Ireland’s port of entries, must determine the age of the young person. This process could prove to be erroneous, which could lead to inevitable and devastating circumstances (Kanics). Perhaps a child who claims to be 16 or 17 is determined by officials to be 18. This means that the unaccompanied minor is

<p>The Statement of Good Practice states that: ...[T]he age assessment includes physical, developmental, psychological and cultural factors. If an age assessment is thought to be necessary, independent professionals with</p>
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now declared as an adult asylum seeker and must commence through the process as an adult.

This is also the case in terms of birthdays as well. Some may not know their birthday, and therefore the question arises of **when** they will become 18 and will no longer be considered an unaccompanied child. The lack of transparency throughout this situation alone may create stress and confusion for the young person and therefore could negatively impact his or her performance in interviews.

This could also place already vulnerable individuals in harm's way, particularly with young women. Girls who are determined to be of adult age would be placed in adult accommodations, which could potentially be harmful and detrimental for the girl's physical and psychological health (Kanics).

Children who cannot prove they are under the age of eighteen are subjected by the Home Office to interviews that are often conducted by non-specialist government officials in hostile environments (Mooten 2006: 13). The decision of the age of the child frequently depends to one opinion, and if inaccurate, a child could be treated as an adult and may become subject to both physical and mental trauma. After acknowledging the need for improvement, the Home Office suggested the use of dental and bone x-rays in

determining the age of applicants. Responses to this from professional medical bodies highlighted the concern regarding the use of ionizing radiation with no clinical benefit, as well as the inaccuracy of the method. Nevertheless, the determination of age is an important factor of whether an asylum seeker will be protected under the Child Care Act of 1991, or will need to go through the process as an adult (Dibnah 2007:3).

Problems with delay:

When the majority of separated children arrived in Ireland in 2001 through 2003, the system was saturated by the number of asylum seekers and did not have the resources to process claims speedily and efficiently. Generally, most of the aged-out minors currently in Ireland arrived. Separated children seeking asylum are a relatively new phenomenon to Ireland with the first separated child arriving in Ireland for the purpose of seeking asylum being identified in 1996 (Mooten 2007:15). Many of these children may have high levels of vulnerability and have experienced gross trauma.

Many face problems and challenges on issues including separation and bereavement from family and friends, social isolation, language barriers, emotional and mental health problems, discrimination and racism. In addition they have to live with the anxiety of possible removal from the country or uncertainty as to their future (Kanics). The immediate and ongoing needs of separated children seeking asylum relating to accommodation, medical and social needs as well as their application for refugee status are the responsibility of the HSE in accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and the Child Care Act, 1991.

However, with the extreme delays in the application process, some separated children have been awaiting a decision for seven years; clearly they are no longer considered to be children, but as young adults now within the age ranged of 18-21. Due to this delay, when children become legal adults at 18 years of age, they are placed into a different category, and they must apply under Direct Provision (Kanics). Their transitional state oftentimes intensifies the problems and challenges of the issues previously addressed. Under Direct Provision, aged-out minors are no longer protected under the Child Care Act, and therefore usually lose state-funded psychological help and counseling, are no longer under the protective care of the Health Board, are not permitted to advance schooling to the third-level tier and are not given as many opportunities for youth work organizations and programs (Moreno). In effect, they are now considered adults, despite the fact that they have entered Ireland as children.

Another predicament that rises from the delay of the system is that the separated children were in their formative and impressionable years and have picked up elements of Irish society, thereby further integrating them into Irish society. They have also established social networks and avenues of support. With Direct Provision and under constant fear of application rejection, it would be very difficult for aged-out minors to reintegrate with their country of origin, if deported. There are examples of aged-out minors who no longer have support systems or social connections in their country of origin, and some perhaps have come to Ireland at a young age, that they consider themselves more as Irish than of their country of origin. In essence, they begin to lose a sense of their original culture, thereby the decision of deporting them into a hostile

environment without the support structure found in Ireland, could be dangerous, and some would claim to be an inhumane act (Mooten 2007: 14).

Aged-out minors find themselves in a limbo situation, where waiting for the unknown can be extremely stressful. Each day, they are not sure whether they will receive a deportation notice and they begin to lose hope. The longer the delay of a decision, the more nervous the minors become. They may also feel incredible sense of frustration, in that they have no control over their future and cannot enjoy their own independence.

Under Direct Provision, aged-out minors are also expected to stunt their process of integration and social interaction. Without the prospects of attending school, seeking employment, and enjoying a sense of independence and self-reliance, there is little accessibility for aged-out minors to alleviate the stress that encompasses them while waiting for the coveted decision. The lack of opportunity often creates a “poverty trap” for this group of individuals (Brennan) which fuels more social issues that affect Dublin as a whole.

Social Capital:

The next section discusses social capital and the benefit of integration for aged-out minors in Irish society—advantages for both Irish society as well as the asylum seeking community. It also touches on some suggestions that the media’s portrayal of asylum-seekers does not give credence to aged-out minors’ attitudes and motivations.

Robert Putnam’s (1993) research has suggested that social capital can be used as a means of curing social inequality and lack of cohesive social trust associated with ethnic diversity. This proposes that the features of social organization such as networks, norms,

and social trust that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit could be discussed within the realm of the movement of immigration and of those seeking refuge (Cheong, et. 2002:24). Within this context, social capital can include the networks and social support that is offered to immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees upon their entry into a different culture and society. By enhancing the capabilities of providing social capital to these groups of individuals, integrative measures can take place and therefore create a more holistic and integrative society without jeopardizing the richness of the multiethnic dimension (Cheong, et. 2002: 35).

Putnam argues in his research conducted in the United States and Canada that considerations of social capital as a public policy tool to achieve social cohesion are needed to incorporate an appreciation of alternative conceptions of social capital rooted in a textured understanding of immigrant processes and migration contexts (Cheong, et. 2002: 40). Concurrently, the process of “linking social capital” refers to the vertical relations that help individuals gain access to resources from formal institutions for social and economic development. Formal institutions for such growth could be educational, economic, social, religious, or community service. According to the data researched, however, aged-out minors residing in Ireland under Direct Provision are not permitted to seek employment, attend full-time education, or participate in many social activities that would allow them to engage in Irish society, thereby limiting the likelihood of successful social cohesion.

Putnam’s (1986) argument of linking social capital is that this form implies the need for government intervention to implement policies to grant new immigrants and asylum-seekers citizenship or rights and entitlements to help them access formal

resources (Cheong, et. 2002:41). Currently, in Ireland this is not the case, as current policy is restrictive of formal resources for aged-out minors.

Minority ethnic populations have been traditionally perceived as ominous and invading *Others*, threatening social norms and violating economic principles (Fanning 2007:107). According to a perception created by the Irish media, asylum-seekers are viewed as bogus and are drying up the social welfare system for those who are native to Ireland or are here contributing to society. Furthermore, there is a perceived competition for resources between groups, whether situationally induced or due to belief in zero-sum relations among groups (Cheong et. 2002: 44), is strongly implicated in negative immigration attitudes.

Another way of thinking about social capital comes from Bourdieu's work. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is conceived as a resource for individual social mobility that works in tandem with other capitals to reproduce social inequalities in various class-specific forms. Active citizenship is built not only on social solidarity and order but also through a local public sphere that supports open-ended engagement, vibrant opposition and negotiation. Unfortunately, aged-out minors in Ireland are often overlooked and essentially invisible from the public sphere, and one can argue that current policy reinforces this segregation. Instead, individuals are given very few options to gain social mobility, thus solidifying their "limbo-like" state. In effect,

"social capital networks are value-based and context specific. Social capital is not a cure-all. Asylum and Immigration policy may influence the conditions governing immigrant integration in the domestic labor market, as well as the social conditions in related home, family and community contexts that serve as social capital building crucibles" (Cheong, et 2002: 35).

Integration:

“It is not possible to walk through a door that is locked and the door to integration in Ireland is locked” Ms Hope Hanlan, UNHCR, 23 March 2000

*“...the more people who are on the margins the weaker is the center...we all have a stake in building a future which respects and celebrates diversity—a generous, sharing Ireland that encompasses many traditions and cultures and creates space for all its people.
President Mary McAlesse 24 February 2000*

There is also evidence that institutional efforts have been made specifically to exclude asylum seekers. “Successive Irish governments have advocated the exclusion of asylum seekers from the participation in Irish society” (Fanning 2002:102). To serve as an example, Nora Owen TD, who lead the Refugee Act in 1996, opposed including a right to work for asylum seekers because, according to their circumstances, they shall not be established in society before the state has determined whether or not they will be permitted to remain. She put it:

“It must be borne in mind that asylum seekers are allowed to remain in the State pending determination of their applications...I do not consider it appropriate to allow people, with temporary permission to remain in the State, to work and put down roots.” (Fanning 2002:103)

Punitive welfare policies aimed to dissuade asylum seekers from applying in Ireland was mentioned by John O’Donoghue TD speech in 1999, when he described asylum seekers as illegal immigrants and exploiters of the Irish welfare system (Fanning 2002:109).

Ultimately asylum seekers—including aged-out minors who are accommodated under direct provision were and continue to be subject to a state-fostered exclusion from Irish society.

This type of exclusion may not be the best for Irish society. Some have made the claim that frequent interaction between immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and citizens is a fundamental prerequisite of integration. The process of integration is also very different from aged-out minors and adult asylum-seekers. Formerly considered as

separated children, there were some attempts in order to integrate the young asylum seekers into Irish society. According to Sr. Ursula Mullen at the Vincentian Refugee Centre, the educational institutions that the children attend are the single most influential mode of integration. Through studies and interactions with Irish children, adults and supervisors, separated children are perpetually included within a structured Irish system. By attending school and making friendships, the children are already becoming more integrated (Mullen).

Also through youth work organizations and programmes, separated children are introduced to activities and sports by Irish standards. Therefore, while waiting for a decision on their applications, separated children go through formal and informal integrative techniques (Moreno, Mullen).

When a separated child becomes an aged-out minor, according to policy, he or she should not be integrated into society until there is a definitive decision that they will stay in the country. By this time, however, these individuals have already proceeded with methods of integration. While there is a strong initiative to segregate aged-out minors from the rest of Irish society, it is then seen that integration is not okay. Unfortunately, many of the outlets of support that aged-out minors were given when considered as separated children is usually dropped based on their new classification.

There is a considerable amount of literature and publications that highlight the needs for separated children in terms of integrating into Irish society and coping with the many emotional and psychological issues and providing support. Separated children are recognized as a heterogenous group with diverse needs, interests and abilities and it is

stressed that there should be an access to the full range of youth work options for them (McCrea 2000:12).

According to many sources, a two-way system is essential (Brennan, Kanics) and must be reflected in asylum policy in order to allow integration to occur successfully. This is in contrast to the notion of assimilation, which is usually frowned upon by most who work on behalf of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. These principles seek to strike a number of balances. The principle of integration as a two-way process is affirmed but so is the insistence that migrants need to engage with the host society, its history and culture. Respect for diversity is affirmed but so is the primary place of core values. Due recognition is given to identity issues, but the more practical issues of employment, education and access to services are also stressed. The achievement of mainstream integration in a cross-sectoral way is recognized as a responsibility of the state, but the need to engage civil society is also recognized. Finally, integration is seen as innately intercultural, therefore there must be active and frequent interaction between migrants and host society (MacLaughlan, O'Connell 2000:230).

With the current Direct Provision policy, there are many imperative elements that aged-out minors could engage in that would allow integration to occur more smoothly. Attending educational institutions is one of the most basic and important avenues of helping aged-out minors engage with the host culture. Through education, individuals would be able to learn English, Irish history, customs, and traditions, while establishing important social connections and friendships that contribute to the individual's well being (Mullen). Under Direct Provision, education is not accessible, thus leaving aged-out minors alienated from the host country.

Homelessness:

According to the Irish Refugee Council (IRC), homelessness has also become problematic, especially among aged-out minors who were not granted status prior to turning 18. These individuals must then apply for direct provision but in the meantime, they cannot get a job and usually need to find their own housing. Jyothi described that homelessness is a very difficult and stressful issue that sometimes results from the asylum policy and the transition from separated child to aged-out minor.

Though some may make the claim that there is not an urgent need to integrate or allow aged-out minors with certain benefits or opportunities, others would also suggest that by producing social issues such as rising homelessness (Khan) among other problems, reflects poorly on the city. From most of the aged-out minors I spoke with, it was reiterated that they wanted to contribute to Irish society, and wanted to disprove the common misconceptions of them broadcasted by the media. Homelessness detracts the effort to challenge the perception of asylum seekers as beggars and thieves but also reflects Irish society and its attitudes about asylum policy.

Taking Illegal Measures:

In addition to homelessness, the current asylum policy encourages asylum-seekers—especially aged-out minors to engage in illegal behaviour. According to the aged-out minors whom I spoke with at Vikings Lodge Hostel, education is one of the most important elements for their personal health. Though not legally permitted to attend full-time education, some aged-out minors have found loopholes in order to go to school. They could certainly do a lot worse than illegally attending school, which demonstrates the priorities and determination generally instilled within this population. Due to the

restraining policies and laws imposed on aged-out minors, many decide to make a choice that will positively affect their future and find ways to acquire an education in Ireland.

There have also been instances when aged-out minors are tempted to find employment “underground”, simply because they need money and self-worth. The lack of social capital inhibits their psychological health and well being, and therefore there are many cases when they find employment that pays below minimum wage in order to make a choice for themselves.

Support:

The following section highlights some of the areas, mostly within the voluntary sector, that provides support and social inclusion for aged-out minors in the Dublin area. Based on the obtained research, these support organizations are essential in providing fruitful work “on the ground” and giving aged-out minors direct contact for emotional and psychological support. In essence, these programmes offer opportunities to build or link social capital, which is otherwise not structured into Irish governmental policy of integration for asylum seekers (McCrea 2002: 14).

The amount of social support that a person has in the new culture can also affect his or her own acculturation stress. It has been suggested that social support helps to alleviate acculturation stress by helping individuals to cope with the uncertainty of being in a strange culture and to achieve a sense of mastery and control over their lives (MacLachlan and O’Connell 2000:52). This is especially important for children separated from their parents or guardians and aged-out minors who may become very frustrated with the lack of control over their lives; dependent on the state through

institutional measures and then targeted as bogus asylum-seekers who wish to abuse Ireland's social welfare system.

Though many have been disgruntled with the public policy and legislation concerning aged-out minors, there are some support organizations that attempt to “fill in the gaps” and aid aged-out minors. Some agencies like the Separated Children Education Service is a social outlet that gives aged-out minors the option of finding basic courses such as English or Computer Literacy. There are other opportunities of mentoring younger separated children or volunteering, which demonstrates the desire to give back to the community as well as providing very important support for those who are now in a similar position. According to Monica Brennan at Integrating Ireland, there are high numbers of volunteers among the immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeking communities, which indicates a strong cry for more opportunities for community outreach. Many aged-out minors volunteer, because there is nothing else they can legally do to contribute to society and challenge the preconceived notions about them in policy and media.

It is also important to continue the support and friendship from the youth work organizers and coordinators with aged-out minors thereby symbolizing that there is still some aspect of social cohesion and support for them. Manuela from Separated Children's Education Service meets with individuals at Vikings Lodge Hostel just to check up on them.

Support through Policy and Networking:

Support also is provided by organizations that work more on a policy and public awareness level, such as Integrating Ireland and The Irish Refugee Council. These organizations work on behalf of asylum-seekers in order to keep issues such as

integration and social opportunities for refugees on a priority list so politicians are continuing the discussion on the legality of asylum-seekers and refugees. Integrating Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council create publications and reports in order to continue fighting for support and policy reform.

Integrating Ireland also serves as a network of groups and organizations ranging from the immigrant population to the asylum-seeking community. By establishing a national support system, each group can bounce ideas off, or learn from others' initiatives. Integrating Ireland puts on seminars, which gives these groups an opportunity to learn and better their programmes while making contact and connections with other analogous individuals. With this support, there is hope that each organization and group will be better equipped for their cause.

Support through Faith and Religion:

Some support for aged-out minors comes from religious organizations, such as the Vincentian Refugee Centre. According to Sr. Ursula, faith and religion are very important in establishing social networks and support, especially for women. There is often an emphasis on support and faith among Christians and Muslims, and with the access to religious support network, it appears that asylum seekers are given an avenue for building or linking social capital. Sr. Ursula recollected that some asylum seekers and refugees have called VRC a "home from home", indicating its role as a safe and comforting haven for those who are particularly vulnerable and who lack support in a new culture.

The VRC also recognizes the importance of helping asylum seekers and refugees maintain connected with their culture of origin, and therefore find ways to adapt. For

example, there are weekly African masses designed to promote cultures of origin from Africa, thus promoting the sense of integration through religion and faith.

Case Studies: Applying Research to Current Situations

The following case studies provide a very real portrayal of the difficulties faced by aged-out minors. The purpose of these case studies is to provide a sense of authenticity about the issues discussed in a more formal and explanatory manner. The first five cases studies were found in a Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project publication and the last three were conducted at Viking's Lodge Hostel. Each specific case reveals common elements of difficulty or hardship usually faced by aged-out minors. Information and data following these case studies will essentially become three-dimensional after understanding the reality that asylum policy, racism, and other elements of difficulties are very real and present in the everyday lives of these individuals. Names have been changed to protect identity and privacy.

John's Story:

John came to Ireland to apply for asylum when he was 16. His country of origin has only just emerged from an horrific civil war, and all the available indicators of development (life expectancy, access to safe drinking water, poverty levels) show a picture of a country that has a massive way to go before its population can enjoy any minimum standards of quality of life. The political situation is uncertain. Despite this, his appeal for leave to remain in Ireland has been turned down.

There are many themes and elements in John's experience that are similar in aged-out minors' cases. Arriving in Ireland at 16 years of age, he is fearful of the lack of determining his own life in Ireland, but knowing that his country of origin is dangerous and that there would not be ample opportunity for him considering that the country must begin to reconstruct itself. Monica and Jyothi argued that allowing aged-out minors to attend full-time schooling not only benefits the individuals but potentially the Irish

society if John's application is accepted. If he is deported back to his country of origin with a degree, he is more likely to help rebuild the infrastructure of the country. Perhaps he could become a doctor, politician, or attorney that would be able to assist in the process of rebuilding. Education would benefit all.

Joe's Story:

Since January 2005, John has been asked to report on a monthly basis to the Garda National Immigration Bureau. Effectively, this means that the possibility of deportation is hanging over his head every time he goes into their offices. Each time he reports, **John is faced with the prospect that he might be taken to prison, to await a flight back to his birth country.** Although this has not yet happened, the stress and anxiety of not knowing his future are having an enormous impact on John. **He has become withdrawn and anxious, and often suffers from physical ailments caused by the stresses of his daily life.** He contemplates going "underground" which would mean leaving the system and fending for himself as an undocumented migrant, but the dangers of this are enormous.

The extreme fear of deportation is common among aged-out minors. Now no longer protected by the Child Care Act of 1991, aged-out minors are "moved" to adult services, which includes several restrictions but also the possible chance of deportation, or the lack of knowing what the future holds. The aged-out minors are essentially waiting in limbo in their transitional position of that as a child to an adult. This uncertainty about deportation does create psychological and physical problems.

Another element highlighted in Joe's case is the role and perception of Gardai among the aged-out minors. Many asylum-seekers come from areas of conflict where the police regiments are corrupt and tyrannical. Associating deportation and fear with the Gardai does not create a positive response and can contribute more anxiety and distrust.

The Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project, which is a group of refugees who meet every Monday night to provide support for fellow refugees, also tries to create a more positive image by inviting Gardai to come and speak with asylum-seekers and refugees about their rights and entitlements, and giving them the opportunity to ask any questions. This initiative attempts to show a more optimistic portrait of the Gardai, as well as it gives the asylum-seekers social capital by providing a familiar social connection to go to if there is a misconception or confrontation among other members of the Gardai.

Another incident that is generally caused from the lethargic and underdeveloped asylum process is that it may force asylum-seekers to “go underground” or engage in illicit activity, many for the reason of gaining dignity and self-respect. By being employed, one perceives himself with self-worth and in effect making a contribution to society. Without this opportunity, depression and anxiety are more likely to rise. Many advocates on behalf of asylum seekers suggest that if an asylum seeker has been waiting for a decision for more than six months, they should be allowed to gain employment or attend school. This would not only contribute to Irish society and give the asylum seekers a sense of their own independence, but it allows them to become more integrated into Irish society, thereby establishing a larger social and support circle and promoting a healthier psyche.

Joseph’s Story:

Joseph comes from a country that has emerged from a **devastating civil war**, which lasted over 25 years. He received a **deportation notice** asking him to report to GNIB in August. On arrival he was taken into custody and **sent to Cloverhill prison**. He was not charged with any offence and found it impossible to believe he could be imprisoned “I did nothing wrong, how can this happen in Ireland?” A private solicitor was organized, Joseph was released, and was granted leave to apply for a judicial review of his case. The **trauma and scars of this experience** will remain. (cite)

Many asylum seekers, like Joseph, come from countries that are embattled by war, with resulting political unrest, everyday violence and terror. Because in this

Portia's Story:

Portia, an aged-out minor who had lived in Ireland for over two years, was **deported to Lagos** earlier this year-a few days before her 20th birthday. On arrival, she was taken into custody, and **released on payment of a "fine"** (with money given to her by some Irish friends for possible emergencies) To her knowledge, she has no **remaining family in Nigeria**. Irish officials gave her no contact number in case of emergencies, and not have attempted to contact her since. The Nigerian government provided no support. She had no shelter, no money, and very few belongings. Portia descended into **deep depression**, and came under serious **pressure to enter into prostitution** in order to survive. Through the concern and intervention of her friends, and with the assistance of an **Irish missionary order**, some small amount of funding has reached her. This has enabled her to rent a room and feed herself. Her Irish friends worry about her and wonder how long they can continue to provide emotional and financial support at this distance.

particular instance war was immersed the country for over 25 years, this aged-out minor grew up only knowing the circumstances of violence and brutality and political and social unrest. Again, a recurring theme is the intimidation of deportation, which is often a grim reality once an unaccompanied minor becomes an aged-out minor. Also, as previously mentioned, many encounters with the Gardai result from misunderstandings and misconception on both parties. Some aged-out minors do find themselves in prison, often because they do not have documentation to carry around declaring who they are as they are awaiting for an application decision. Ultimately, psychological damage such as trauma result from these unfortunate encounters.

Girls and women who are seeking asylum are particularly vulnerable. In Portia's story, she was deported to Lagos after remaining in Ireland for two years. Not quite twenty years old, she arrives in Lagos and is required to pay a "fine" in order to be released. This is common for those who are deported and return to their country of

origin. Oftentimes they are sought out and are pressured to pay a phony fine or bribe in order to “stay out of trouble”. Without having family in Nigeria, she lacks any support system, as she was tossed out of the support system she had created for the last two years in Ireland. Without anything resources and with bare necessities, women are often forced to make the tremendous consideration of entering prostitution. Without any social or economic capital, depression often seeps in, and thereby making them hopeless and devastated by the current circumstances.

In Portia’s story, she is provided some monetary assistance from an Irish missionary order, which does demonstrate the presence of religious orders attempting to provide some support for asylum-seekers. According to Sr. Ursula Mullen at the Vincentian Refugee Centre (VRC), faith and religion are very important in bringing people together and establishing some social and supportive connections. Oftentimes, the church and other religious gathering places serve as a safe haven, particularly for women who otherwise feel alienated and hopeless with their situation. The VRC does have women support groups that allow women to come together and talk about their circumstances as well as obtaining information about other support organizations and initiatives. Oftentimes, word of mouth is the most efficient way of spreading information around in regards to resources for asylum-seekers and refugees.

David's Story:

David was born in Nigeria and came to Ireland as a separated child seeking asylum in 2001, when he was 16 years of age. He had a large scar, almost healed, on his forehead, and shook with anxiety. During the following two-and a-half years he developed from a scared teenager into a fine young man. He attended literacy classes and proudly stated that he “loved his school”. Aged 18, David was moved into “adult services”. He no longer had the support of the Health Board and the psychologist who had been counseling him. In August 2004, David received a letter asking him to report for deportation. In fear, he disappeared. Nothing was heard about him until Monday 13th December 2004. A phone call from England said he had been taken into a Britain hospital the previous day. David died of a brain tumour on Wednesday December 15, 2004, aged 19. His many friends in Ireland were devastated and, as they could not attend his burial, they held a memorial service in one of the hostels.

Like the other case studies previously mentioned, David came to Dublin as a separated child during the peak of the asylum-seeker arrivals in Ireland. There is physical proof that he was a victim of violence, as suggested by the presence of a scar and that he was frightful with anxiety. During his time in Ireland, he was able to receive support and to go to school, which allowed him to integrate into society and become a “fine young man”. Like many other aged-out minors, David recognized that schooling and attaining education was absolutely essential to living a better life and contributing to society. Upon turning 18 he is no longer completely protected under the Child Care Act and therefore is cannot meet with his psychologist. With a notice of deportation, David fled.

This is another issue that plagues the aged-out minor community but goes largely unnoticed or underreported in Irish media. Many separated children go missing upon arrival in Ireland, and yet there is not an extremely motivated effort to find out what has happened. Jyothi, from the Irish Refugee Council, warned that these missing children and aged-out minors (especially girls) could be victims of human trafficking or forced

into underground prostitution rings. Many whom I spoke with mentioned that the inflexibility and rigidity of the current asylum process and procedure coerces asylum-seekers (especially children and young adults) to make difficult decisions that could be consequentially dangerous and perilous to the well being of the asylum-seeker.

Mark's Story:

Mark comes from a war torn country in Africa and has been living in Ireland for **four years**. He is an extremely personable, intelligent person to speak with and did very well in school up until his Irish Living Certificate. Though he wears a kind smile and likes to joke around, he is frustrated by many of the **restrictions imposed on him**. His greatest obstacle is that he cannot work, and therefore cannot be independent and afford his own accommodation. He would certainly love his own place to live for privacy, **considering that the hostel he currently resides in is crowded and loud**. He is a typical young adult, who likes to listen to rap and pop...a lot. Despite his struggles to get into courses and his restriction for gaining employment, Mark has been very appreciative of the people he has met and has gone out of their way to assist him in anyway they can. Though fearful of deportation and an unknown future that is beyond his grasp, he tries to stay positive, thanks to all of **the support and friendship** he has found in Dublin.

He mentioned all of the restrictions that are imposed on him and that he is frustrated by the present system and its structure, but he remains hopeful that a positive decision will come forth and then he can begin to take control of his life. This was another common thread throughout many case studies on aged-out minors. As young people, this group of individuals generally exhibit tremendous drive in order to integrate and create engage in social behaviour as well as a willingness to contribute to Irish society through means of work or schooling. Without the possibility of pursuing either, depression and hopelessness settle in, creating restlessness. By living in fear for years while waiting in limbo for an application decision, many formative and impressionable years are wasted therefore contributing to signs of extreme depression and anxiety.

Dylan's Story:

Dylan came from Afghanistan to Ireland **three years ago**. He is quite critical of the hostel accommodations, as he claims that it can be tremendously loud and disturbing, the building itself is not in the best location or in the best shape, and the food provided is inadequate and not filling. He stresses that with only 19.10 euro a week for spending money, he finds it extremely difficult to pay for supplemental snacks and food, or splurge on necessary clothing. Though still very cynical about the asylum process and his current restrictive situation, **he loves talking about cricket and football**. He wishes he could play more often, but he is feeling **hopeless about his future** and helpless that he cannot influence the direction that his life will lead.

There are also cases similar to Dylan's, in that aged-out minors exhibit extreme criticism from the process, which usually results based on the delay of receiving decisions. The hostel accommodations, which are usually privately-run with lack of transparency or oversight, often only provide minimal care for the inhabitants, including food and space. Most bedrooms in the hostels house two or three individuals, which often makes it impossible for privacy or "quiet time". Dylan also mentioned that the provided food is often inadequate but with the punitive weekly stipend, additional food choice is restricted. The future, according to Dylan is quite grim and he feels as if he isn't able to do anything for enjoyment, such as playing football or cricket.

Jim's Story:

Jim has been in Ireland from an African country, attempting to gain refugee status for **seven years**. He appeared to be a tremendously kind hearted, imaginative, intelligent, and articulate young person who is illegally enrolled in third-level education and is constantly worried about the repercussions if he is revealed. Like Mark and Dylan, he is frustrated that he cannot have control of his own life and that the restrictions placed on him makes him feel worthless to Irish society. He is quite knowledgeable about current and local affairs in Dublin, and believes that his situation will worsen due to the economic crisis. **He believes that racism and xenophobia will be punctuated in the streets, and this fear worries him constantly.** Nevertheless, he is extremely bright and hopes to have the independence to be employed and own his own house. He holds on to a few dreams and aspirations, such as becoming an architect and moving to a much busier and “exciting” city. He has read about a place called New York City, and would love to visit there, but he is currently tied down in the asylum process waiting to seek his decision. Like Mark, he is very thankful for the people who have met with him and have tried to help in any way possible. The support is very important in order for him to continue thinking about his future and his free will to determine his own destiny.

Jim has been in Ireland awaiting a decision for seven years. He is an extremely personable and intelligent individual who brought forth many elements and concerns that he is currently (and anticipating) facing. Again, his testimony signifies the general consensus that aged-out minors do not want to be restrained or viewed as draining all of Ireland's social welfare resources. In fact, he wishes to have his own independence to make his own decisions, to work and pay his own bills, to take ownership and responsibility, and to have the dignity to make choices that will impact his future. Social welfare, to him, is in fact stunting his potential and the restrictions for full-time education and employment gives him very few opportunities. This shatters a well known misconception not only in Ireland but in other developed countries housing asylum-seekers and refugees as well.

Looking towards the future, Jim felt that things for him were going to get much worse. In times of economic crisis, he believes that the colour of his skin will target him as a “scapegoat” for the problems that Ireland is encountering. Another misconception usually resurfaces and he will be seen as an economic threat and competitor, though he is not permitted to seek employment anyway. He is also concerned about the maintenance

and funding of the programmes that he has no choice but to rely, such as the hostel and other governmental programming. He assumes that the funding for these programmes will likely be the first to go, and evidence proves that interculturalism and integration initiatives are on the bottom of the barrel in terms of Irish policy and legislation.

Jim also made a comment that he is surprised with how many “blocked heads” there are in a developed country such as Ireland, meaning that people were usually close-minded. He marveled at the idea that racism and xenophobia could be present in such a society that is considered much more developed and wealthy in comparison to his country of origin. “It’s amazing, you know, there are people in the country I came from who have their way of seeing things, but even here in a developed society, people still have “blocked heads”.

Nevertheless, Jim still dares to dream big, mentioning how he would love to live in a much bigger and bustling city like New York and to become an architect. He thought that it was strange that he hoped to aspire for things that he would never would have had the opportunity to pursue, but with the help of the support he receives by organizations, as well as obtaining full-time education illegally, he still has a motivated sense of independence and control over his future. He will always try to keep dreaming.

Conclusion and Reflection:

Throughout this experience there were many possibilities and opportunities that led me down unintended and unanticipated paths. Initially, I structured my study by how separated children are integrated into Irish society and what cultural cues are learned and reinforced through youth work programs provided for this group of asylum-seekers. Though mounting difficulties such as access to speak with separated children undoubtedly inhibited this study's focus and depth, I realized the need to be flexible and to gather as much information as I could. By doing this, I came across another important issue that I would have more access and that there is much less recognition in Irish society.

This is the situation with approximately 200 asylum seekers categorized as “aged-out minors” in the Dublin area. Upon reading and meeting some of these individuals, it became clear to me that aged-out minors face many obstacles but are often invisible or ignored in Irish public policy and society. Separated children, while considered one of the most vulnerable groups in Ireland, are often protected by the legislation of the 1991 Child Care Act. In general, the Irish public is very accepting and sympathetic towards children, especially of those who have experienced hardships unfathomable to many. There is often a romantic notion of an innocent childhood, and that every child should be given the opportunity to experience. Therefore, children classified as unaccompanied minors, though not receiving the most exemplary care, usually are entitled to protection rights.

It was very interesting to note how the Irish perception changes once separated children are re-categorized as aged-out minors, as indicative in Irish policy. Though still vulnerable and impressionable, there are many elements of Irish society that suggests that

many protective elements will not transfer with aged-out minors. After speaking with a few aged-out minors, it was stressed that more burdens were placed on them after growing older. They are now perceived as threats and competitors, though most of the Irish public does not realize that these individuals are forbidden to gain access for employment or education.

Also, I was surprised that the laws and policies concerning aged-out minors compels them to engage in “illicit activity” such as illegally seeking out third level schooling or finding employment that offers less than minimum wage pay. As discussed by those I visited at Vikings Lodge Hostel, aged-out minors generally want dignity. There was an overall consensus that they wanted to give back to the Irish community, and that though they are aware of the misperceptions usually carried by Irishmen and women, they want to gain some dignity and independence. Many have not had the opportunity to make decisions that shape their future.

One of the most impressionable moments during this experience was the conversation I had with one aged-out minor. During the discussion, there was a tense lull as we hit an emotional rock. Trying to recover, we began to talk about Dublin and how small it was in comparison to other cities. He mentioned that he had read about New York City, and he commented that he would probably love to live there because there is so much noise and movement all of the time. He was in awe that the city never sleeps and he hoped that one day he would be able to visit America. He then began talking about a few other hopes and fantasies that he has dared to dream, such as becoming an architect and living in a large house. He mentioned how strange it was though he never had the opportunity to pursue any of these “fantastical dreams”, he would not stop

thinking about them. I was extremely impressed by his strength and insight during this conversation and it put a lot into perspective for me.

Throughout that conversation, I recognized that I had entered in their territory. There were times when I felt awkward asking a particular question, especially in reference to education. My intent on being there in the first place was to gather data for a paper during my study abroad program. In effect, I am in Ireland on my own free will and choice, enjoying the fruits and liberties of third level education when they must go through illegal means to dangerously pursue any source of education.

Ultimately, I found that the people who I met throughout this academic journey have greatly affected me personally. I have had the opportunity of meeting passionate and dedicated individuals who live through their work by serving as a mouthpiece for immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

It was also important to realize that relationships were the most important thread throughout my research, quite possibly because this social issue concerning aged-out minors is not about statistics or figures but of people. I have concluded that the relationships that the aged-out minors create, whether with advocates or with each other, are the single most important factor of their emotional health and well being. Obviously, aged-out minors are awaiting a stressful decision that will inevitably shape their lives. Support and social interaction are essential elements in order to assist aged-out minors. The Vincentian Refugee Centre, Integrating Ireland, the Separated Children Education Service, and other programs and organizations attempt to assist these young and nervous individuals by providing them with social interaction and capital.

Throughout the development of this project, I have witnessed a personal transformation. Though I have had previous experience working with refugee children in the United States, I feel that I have gained a deeper understanding of the difficulties and struggles they face. I hope that I can translate the findings of this study into becoming a more sensitive and empathetic mentor and tutor in the United States.

I also have a much deeper appreciation for the opportunities I have been offered. I have been extremely fortunate to spend a semester living in Dublin and getting the chance to meet incredibly passionate and caring individuals. Though facts and figures were necessary, this study's main composition consists of the relationships and the people who are affected by asylum policy and process.

I believe that this study cannot be considered finished, as there are many elements and themes that could not be addressed in a short time frame. Rather, it has only concluded with hopes that further study will follow. Recommendations for further investigation on this social issue in Dublin include: make appointments with involved politicians; conduct a deeper exploration on case studies; and analyze more historical background and information concerning Ireland's reception of refugees and asylum seekers. Nevertheless, this study opens a door to lead to a discussion concerning an invisible and often overlooked segment of Dublin's population that has been created due to the extreme deficiency and delay of the asylum seeking process in Ireland.

Glossary of Significant Terms

Acculturation: the process of assimilating new ideas into an existing cognitive structure; in the theories of Jean Piaget: the application of a general schema to a particular instance

Assimilation: the state of being assimilated; people of different backgrounds come to see themselves as part of a larger national family; the social process of absorbing one cultural group into harmony with another; the process of absorbing nutrients into the body after digestion;

Asylum-Seeker: A person who seeks to be recognized as a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol (incorporated into Irish law under the Refugee Act, 1996). An asylum seeker has a legal right to remain in the State while his/her application is being processed.

Integration: The ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity.

Intercultural education: A model of education that promotes an appreciation of participants' own identity and of cultural difference and diversity. It also highlights similarities between cultures. Intercultural education seeks to develop the learners' capacity to recognize and challenge stereotypes, prejudices, racism and inequality.

Refugee: According to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1996 Refugee Act, a refugee is defined as:

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Separated Child: A child or young person under the eighteen years of age who is outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or legal or customary primary caregiver.

Social Capital: Definitions of Social Capital vary with nearly every scholar. Included in this glossary are the working definitions of Putnam and Bourdieu.

Features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, R).

'The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (Bourdieu)

-->**Bridging:** "Bridging social capital ... refers to the building of connections between heterogeneous groups; these are likely to be more fragile, but more likely also to foster social inclusion." (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000)

-->**Bonding:** "Bonding social capital refers to the links between like-minded people, or the reinforcement of homogeneity. It builds strong ties, but can also result in higher walls excluding those who do not qualify, (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000)

Social Cohesion: In the dominant discourse, social cohesion is taken the mean a common national identity built via the development of common values, shared symbol, shared ceremonies, and so on (Cheong et al. 2007:39)

There are also alternative views on social cohesion. Ash Amin (2002) refers to an illustration of daily negotiations of ethnic differences by immigrants in mixed neighborhoods marked by strong ethnic polarities, to contend that:

The distinctive features of mixed neighborhoods is that they are communities without community, each marked by multiple and hybrid affiliations of varying social and geographical reach, and each intersecting momentarily (or not) with another one for common local resources and amenities... This blunts any idea of an integrated community with substantial overlap, mutuality, and common interest between its resident groups. Mixed neighborhoods need to be accepted as the spatially open, culturally heterogeneous, and socially variegated spaces that they are, not imagined as future cohesive or integrated communities. (Amin 2002:972)

Youth Work: A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation. It is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education or training and is provided primarily by voluntary youth work organizations.

Youth Work Sector: The scope of organizations, groups, personnel at a local, regional and national level who undertake and contribute to the provision of youth work.

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Integration Statement- Conor Lenihan Minister of Integration

Irish life as we know it from our history and experience as a people has been very much defined by migration. The presence of so many Irish in such far-flung places from home as New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, South Africa, Canada and the United States are ample testimony to the Irish emigrant story and its resonance around the world. In the context of our nearest neighbour there has been constant movement of people in both directions for centuries. In purely historical terms it is not an exaggeration to state that the Irish identity is as much a product of those who left our shores as those who stayed at home.

The common experience of my own generation, writing as someone who was an emigrant in the late 1980s, was that there were not enough jobs in the Ireland that chose to educate us. As our President Mary McAleese has said: *“We have a recent memory of the loneliness, the sense of failure evoked by our inability to provide for our own people and the courage it took to start a new life far from home.”*

This Ministerial Statement of policy is predicated on the idea that Ireland has a unique moral, intellectual and practical capability to adapt to the experience of inward migration. There are now in excess of 420,000 non-Irish born people living in our country and my sense is that the percentage of non-Irish could be as high as 12% of the population.

The key challenge facing both Government and Irish society is the imperative to integrate people of much different culture, ethnicity, language and religion so that they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century.

The important point for all Irish citizens to understand is that immigration is happening in Ireland because of enormous recent societal and economic improvement, beginning in the 1990s, but built upon an opening to the world created by the late Seán Lemass as Taoiseach in the 1960s.

Ireland is now ranked amongst the richest countries in the world on a per capita income basis. In order to consolidate our position of affluence, continued inward migration must be accompanied by a renewed investment in social stability with its demonstrable link to productivity gains.

The societal gains from properly managed immigration are obvious and the demographic profile of the migrants we have attracted to Ireland to date illustrates this rather vividly. The labour force participation ratio for immigrant adults is in excess of 90% compared to 65% plus for the indigenous population.

Barriers in the areas of language skill acquisition and recognition of degree and non-degree level qualifications keep many migrants in jobs they are over-qualified to do. Ireland's pattern of inward migration is distinctly different to what has occurred elsewhere in Europe and the world in that the great bulk of our migrants come from within the European Union as opposed to other continents.

So what does your Government, public bodies and our society need to do to achieve migrant integration?

Ministerial Statement of Policy envisages the following key actions:

- A clear commitment to Immigration Laws that control and facilitate access to Ireland for skilled migrants with a contribution to make.
- A formal pathway to Permanent Residency and Citizenship for those who qualify.
- A streamlined asylum process which progressively reduces inordinate administrative and legal delays.
- Specific funding from Government and Philanthropic sector to support diversity management in Local Authorities, political parties, sporting bodies and faith-based groups who deal with migrant needs on a daily basis.
- Citizenship and long-term residency to be contingent on proficiency of skills in the spoken language of the country.
- More targeted support for teachers and parents dealing with diversity in the classroom or school setting.
- Enhanced institutional and legislative measures to be in place to combat exploitation or discrimination against migrants in the context of the Government's implementation of "Towards 2016".
- New structures to assist and reflect the changed dynamic of migration into Ireland, i.e. a standing Commission on Integration, a Ministerial Council on Integration and a Task Force to establish future policy needs. In essence therefore the key "Principles" which will inform and underpin State policy with regard to Integration are as follows:
 - A partnership approach between the Government and nongovernmental organisations, as well as civil society bodies, to deepen and enhance the opportunities for Integration.
 - A strong link between integration policy and wider state social inclusion measures, strategies and initiatives.
 - A clear public policy focus that avoids the creation of parallel societies, communities and urban ghettos, i.e. a mainstream approach to service delivery to migrants.
- A commitment to effective local delivery mechanisms that align services to migrants with those for indigenous communities.

All of the available research evidence by way of public opinion polls show that the Irish people are adapting well to what has been, by international comparison, a very rapid transformation of the country to diversity.

Professional surveys of attitudes, conducted at both European and domestic level, indicate that Irish people have a high level of day to day contact with our newcomer population and a lower incidence of racially-motivated attacks on migrant individuals. Our identity and reputation as a friendly and welcoming people demands that we continue to manage immigration issues with sensitivity. Integration policy in Ireland will be a two-way street involving rights and duties for those migrants who reside, work and in particular those who aspire to be Irish citizens.

Field Notes Excerpts

The following notes were taken in a “stream of consciousness” form mostly because they were written as soon as possible from the meeting or experience. Therefore, the informality of the notes captures the freshness and significance of the particular points that were considered especially important (or most noticeable and impressive). The underlining emphasizes the themes or ideas that reappeared in other field note entries and therefore warranted as points of significance. The inclusion of these excerpts is to provide some insight with the development of this study.

3/4/09 Beginnings

I am very excited to begin the interviewing aspect of my ISP next week, and I believe that I have made some worthy appointments with people that will be able to assist me and my experiential learning. The Irish Refugee Council, Integrating Ireland, the Foundations Project, and the Separated Children Education Service will be able to provide me with insight in terms of analyzing what aspects of Irish Identity is relayed to Separated Children. One thought I have had is that because these children are not exactly accepted as a long-term refugee yet, will there be an emphasis on integration, or will it seem as if they are simply in limbo and are dependent of whether or not they will begin the process of “integration” or “assimilation” (whatever those words indicate!) I am very interested in learning about Irish identity, and I am also wondering whether or not Irish culture is adaptable to the newfound multicultural atmosphere. Also something that I would like to figure out is the nationality of individuals working at these organizations. Are they also refugees or migrants that have already been through this process or are they Irish who feel the need to highlight certain important Irish features to Separated Children. Throughout my preliminary research, it is interesting to note that there are lots of policies that fail to mention the educational or social services for separated children between the ages of 16-18. How does this affect integration? I have also stumbled upon some statistics of missing children (what does this mean? Where are they going?) I am hoping to schedule an appointment for the Vincentian Refugee Centre, because I would like to know how the Catholic Church (seen as an influential element of Irishness) helps Separated Children. Is it worthy to note the fact that many separated children, refugees, and asylum seekers are exposed to Catholicism early on in the process of integration). Perhaps they have come to Ireland because they had met missionaries in their homeland and thought to pursue a “better, safer” life in Ireland. Could this indicate Ireland’s influence in a global perspective? What does this mean about Ireland’s identity in a changing world?

9/4/09 Meeting with Monica Anne Brennan from Integrating Ireland

Another important aspect she discussed was that asylum-seekers have the opportunity to vote in local elections. With this, asylum seekers need to recognize their rights and entitlements as well as become educated on voting and local elections. Monica discussed that a few years ago there was a hope for state infrastructure to develop and create a better integration policies and awareness among the Irish. A year ago the very little state funding Integrating Ireland given was cut even more, and the programme for interculturalism was cut out completely and the minister for integration will probably be

the first to be cut out. Integrating Ireland lobbies and tries to keep integration and interculturalism an issue on the government agenda. Trying to give leadership workshops so that asylum seekers and refugees can lead in communities and build strength. To this day, there are no state integration strategy, unlike the rest of the European Union.

Reflections on Progress 15/409

Though I am disappointed that Irish identity will not be the crux of my research, I am hoping that the case studies on Thursday will provide enough fodder to come to a few conclusions, or at least derive a few more questions. Other than that, I am analyzing how the Irish perceive separated children and how that in effect reveals their values and norms. It is very interesting to me that the Irish themselves have realized that Dublin is becoming very diverse and multicultural, which seems to threaten their own identity as well. Perhaps that is why those whom I have met have been relatively young. In terms of refugees versus immigrants, there is an economic factor to it, and the perception of the different groups varies. Many Irish whom I spoke with believed that the immigrants should go away, because they are sucking up the few precious Irish resources left from the native Irish. This is one of my questions however, “native Irish”...how can you tell anymore? I am sure that there is a disparity of “Irishness” when comparing rural to urban Ireland, and Dublin was the chief target and “benefactor” of the Celtic Tiger and presented the opportunities that immigrants and asylum-seekers hope to find. Regardless of the growth of the Celtic Tiger, Monica argued that the peak of immigrant and asylum-seeking arrivals was in 2000-01, and has steadily been declining.

When developing this ISP, I made the assumption that the assimilationist model would be relevant in Ireland. I thought that integration would possibly mean to create one national identity. This does not seem to be the case, however, and with this acknowledgement, the study took a different turn. How can I figure out what aspects of Irish identity is implicitly taught to the separated children when there are apparent institutional obstacles and difficulties for integrating separated children. Separated children are, in fact, largely invisible in the Irish political sphere, and therefore the Irish do not see them either. This ISP then, took a diverted route to figure out the difficulties, due to the time constraint of the project and the determination of who would be able to meet with me. Ultimately, though I hoped this study would create an in depth scope of separated children integrating into Irish culture, I recognize its potentiality to launch more questions concerning separated children and the institutional impediments in order to fully care for them.

16/4/09 Vincentian Refugee Centre Visit

VRC: Homey atmosphere with lots of support provided for refugees and asylum seekers. In reference to unaccompanied children, there are homework clubs and (was English) but VRC is now a referral center because there are many other places that teach English. Accommodations are also an important and stressful task for those who do not understand the bureaucratic system (or English) VRC gives some legal advice and housing information. In terms of integrating, the church provides a social gathering atmosphere that provides support for those who need it. At 2:30pm on Sundays there is an African Mass, which also provides a social environment so that oftentimes vulnerable and timid asylum seekers with friends and connections. Services such as the VRC are

mentioned via word of mouth throughout the asylum-seeking and refugee community and therefore it is vital that information like this is passed on. Education is important as well, sometimes educational qualifications from the country of origin is not recognized in Ireland, and therefore there is hardly avenues to produce legitimate documentation, such as diplomas, birth certificates, etc. Therefore, the VRC attempts to help clear out the process.

There is a women's group that provides psychological support. In terms of interacting with Irish people, the VRC does not have a formal structure. With the homework club, volunteers are generally Trinity students who have been through the process recently and therefore can help out with the studies. Outside of homework club, the volunteers may invite the students to other social functions, therefore increasing their contact with the Irish. Examples of this include Deb dance (prom) and a Christmas Party, which indicates the potentiality of befriending the volunteers outside of VRC's formal homework club sessions.

VIKING LODGE HOSTEL

around 50 in one hostel 2-3 in a room

I spoke with 5 men, 4 from Africa and one from Afghanistan. Aged-out minors. The hostel was plain and eerie (not a typical home) and is not personalized or owned by the inhabitants. Relationships are incredibly important and there is a general disgust of governmental policy and action for asylum-seekers. The process is one big headache. The people that they meet with for the most part are sympathetic, one of them was very much in tuned with the current Irish political affairs; Things are going to get worse, people are still "blocked heads" here, as they were in the less developed, war torn country. You would think that more sophisticated, developed, wealthier country would not have this type of problem...

They are very articulate and educated, I was interviewed before I gained clearance and rapport. They are very cautious and wanted to know exactly what my paper was on, I felt that there were instant connections with them, they were so personable, although the last 3 were very standoffish at first, until you begin to talk about football or cricket. They were all very passionate and lots of dreams were mentioned, even though they painted a dismal picture of life in the hostel and the restrictions that they face everyday. Independence and giving back to the community was essential, but lack of these only further solidifies the stereotypes of asylum-seekers as lazy and dumb. They are not, and one only needs to sit with them and have a chat and only then will they debunk the myths and false notions of this group of people. There is lots of waiting around, and at times the conversation would come to a lull, and therefore diffusion of the intensity was needed. IT was very important to establish rapport but perhaps more crucially, to tailor questions so that they do not invoke harm to the interviewees. Speaking with asylum-seekers was a difficult task and was awkward at times, in some cases it was I who felt vulnerable because I was tiptoeing the serious issues that they face out of politeness. "I'm sure you know of our situation" a response to this is very difficult to come up with on the spot, and so I showed empathy and sympathy, and tried to create more parallels with my life with theirs. Until now, I did not recognize the specialty of America and how there are lots of opportunities there. Education is first-rate; healthcare is good (if one can afford it) and job opportunities, courses are immeasurable and various. Racism is a problem, and one

of those interviewed mentioned that instead of the Spire, which is to demonstrate the New Ireland, the money should have been invested in the hospitals. He also talked about housing and the incredible expenses! He hoped to have his own dreams come true, want to live independently in a really busy city. Currently, however, his life is on a hold because of pieces of paper declaring his “status”. This was one of the most sickest things I witnessed. On multiple occasions “status” was mentioned and one of the last three had managed to get his status. He now wants to enroll in full-time English courses (Speaking with Manuela about options) but once he mentioned that he had his status, the tension thickened. It really seems to be a stressful and laborious process...Overall, I believe that I learned more about myself and how I responded to certain things more so than the formality and intent of visiting the hostel. It was very very interesting!

18/4/09 Check In With Advisor

Today I met with Eamon, my advisor, just to go over a few questions and what I have already written down. Realizing that my initial topic was very broad and impractical to accomplish successfully within the allotted time frame, I have decided to redevelop my study to focus on the difficulties and the perceptions of aged-out minors. I have been very interested with the case of aged-out minors as there is little literature about them and that they do not gain as much media attention as separated children. It is interesting that they have come as separated children, but the state recognizes a different status for them once they reach the age of 18. They are now adults and must be perceived as such, though the difficulties and obstacles they face are by no means diminished. They are in a transitional state in how they are viewed by Irish society but the fears that a separated child may have is still the same. The policies implemented are lackluster and inefficient to meet the needs of aged-out minors, and they are still in the system with whether or not their application will be approved. There is a lot of acculturation and psychological stress, and therefore social organizations and support groups are imperative in helping these individuals cope with life-changing processes. Unfortunately, my research has led me to believe that these support organizations and programs are not given enough funding or support from the state in order to do exemplary work, therefore making another difficulty on the process of integration for aged-out minors. Also, I am appealed to aged-out minors because they are essentially in “limbo”, in that they do not know whether their application will be approved or rejected but they are not allowed to work or seek full-time educational opportunities. Also, with only 19 euro a week, there is little option for them to engage in social activities, thus there is not much they can do other than to wait. This waiting can be detrimental to their mental health and psyche and depression could become an inevitable factor.

Reflection on making the patchwork quilt

21/4/09

It is as if this project is coming together quite smoothly. For a while I had a difficult time trying to make sense of all of the information that I had collected in the three weeks of gaining research. I have found that the case studies that I conducted, as well as a few stories that I found in a publication from the Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project would be the crux of my paper, but I wasn't quite sure how I was going to include them. I think that the most appropriate way of utilizing them will to showcase them in the end of my

paper in order to apply all of the supplementary research and theory that I have found to the everyday lives, and the real situations of the people who are deeply affected by asylum policy and procedure. It is one thing to look at the statistics and infer statements according to those, but it is quite another to see the difficulties through a snapshot perspective of the actual individual who is faced with the struggles and obstacles put in place by their current situation and their haunting past. Also, I was extremely impressed with a few of the individuals that I had met at Vikings Lodge hostel, and I believe that that opportunity was the single most impressionable experience that I had in terms of the course of this study. It put a lot of things into perspective for me because, when I was sitting down with them, it was as if I was speaking to someone who could be my friend back home in the States. They are extremely personable, knowledgeable, friendly, and we had some great conversations not for the sake of my paper, but as a means of having social interaction with someone from the “outside” in their case, and for me someone on the “inside”. I believe that the course of my research period changed once I met them, as I anticipated, because of how sincere and interesting they were. Perhaps the visit provoked my sympathy towards them, as well as a frustration towards the “system”, but it is interesting to just take the experience as par and to recognize the difficulties they face, yet they hold some hope in their hearts. I was inspired by the meeting and I am fortunate that this study brought me to this point where I could meet such courageous and intellectual individuals.

Now, onward to making it all fit together...

It has been a little difficult in putting things together, but I think that the use of the case studies will work out. First of all, I chose the case studies and then highlighted the important aspects of the stories that I thought would be important to display for the sake of my study. Then, after analyzing the indicators of difficulty (and of present support) I was able to refocus and figure out what I wanted to convey in the beginning of my paper. Policy and the need to define certain legal terms is crucial, along with discussing the role of support organizations (religious VRC) and policy organizations and in what way they attempt to provide support for aged-out minors, who are often invisible in the Irish public or political eye. Also important to present is the increased level of homelessness, lack of integration, inaccessibility to formal resources that ensure social capital (social capital in turn can be included in volunteering, which lots of refugees and asylum-seekers do and other support organizations)

Abstract

This report is the outcome of a month-long exploratory study on the difficulties and restrictions aged-out minors aged between 18 and 22 years old in Dublin (including Dun Laoighaire). Data was obtained by way of several qualitative methods such as focused interviews, case studies, academic research to shape theoretical framework, and personal introspection and growth through field notes and reflection. It is concluded that there are restrictions in infrastructure, policy, and asylum process that creates a long, unnecessary delay for asylum application decisions. Recommendations for potential future studies include a narrow investigation in the management and efficiency of the current asylum application process and how a more accessible and expedient process could ease this particular issue in multicultural Dublin.